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ÁGNES KRIZA, *Depicting Orthodoxy in the Russian Middle Ages. The Novgorod Icon of Sophia, the Divine Wisdom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2022 [= Oxford Studies in Byzantium], pp. 362*.

The phenomenon of Sophia – the Divine Wisdom, as represented in the art and literature of medieval Byzantine-Slavic cultural area, has already been examined by scholars from both theological and historical perspectives. The fact that Ágnes Kriza decided to revisit the topic in her doctoral thesis (defended at the University of Cambridge in 2017) was justified by what seems to be the best possible reason one may have in studying the past – the discovery of a new source, a wall painting with the image of Sophia of the Novgorodian type. The painting was uncovered during the restoration work carried out by Vladimir Sarabianov in the cell of archbishop John in the Archiepiscopal Palace in Novgorod the Great in 2006–2007. The fresco is dated to 1441 and, consequently, its discovery allows us to shift the moment at which the iconography of the Divine Wisdom characteristic of the Novgorodian art was born, to the first half of the fifteenth century, or, more specifically, to the period in which the function of the local archbishop was exercised by Euthymius II (1429–1458).

Moreover, the Author, aware of the fact that one of the problems encountered in studies of

the images of the personified Divine Wisdom has been that of a small body of written sources directly related to it, has decided to introduce to scholarly circulation what is known as ‘Sophia commentary’ (*Слово о Премудрости*) – a source which, while it was analysed in some of the previous works (based on the manuscript ГИМ, Чуд. 320, fol. 341r–342r)¹, has never been subjected to a thorough codicological and historico-literary examination. The source’s scholarly edition (based on the five manuscripts from 1450s–1470s) and its English translation are included in the appendix to Kriza’s work. It contains scholarly commentary discussing such issues as the dating and origin of the source’s different manuscripts, the manuscripts’ interrelations (*stemma codicum*), the text’s three different redactions and the specification of other texts that come next to it in various manuscripts (p. 289–302). The first part of the monograph is devoted to the analysis of the ‘Sophia commentary’, which is juxtaposed with other texts pertaining to the Divine Wisdom known in the area of *Slavia Orthodoxa* (*Word*, p. 19–64).

Based on the analysis mentioned above, which takes into account the findings of the research on the images of Sophia of the Novgorodian type from the fifteenth and sixteenth

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¹ Recently in works: В.Т. БРЮСОВА, *Икона „София Премудрость Божия” новгородского перевода и „Слово о Премудрости”*, [in:] *Герменевтика древнерусской литературы*, vol. X, ed. М.Ю. ЛЮСТРОВ, Москва 2000, p. 384–395; Z.A. BRZOWSKA, *Sofia – upersonifikowana Mądrość Boża. Dzieje wyobrażeń w kręgu kultury bizantyńsko-słowiańskiej*, Łódź 2015 [= BL, 24], p. 368–371.

centuries (the catalogue of those images is included in the appendix, p. 303–316), Krisa has put forward an original and remarkable thesis, according to which the canon of representing the Divine Wisdom as a figure attired in imperial robes and seated on the throne, in the form of *deesis*, was elaborated, simultaneously with the ‘Sophia commentary’, on the initiative of archbishop Euthymius II in Novgorod the Great shortly after 1439. As such, it should be regarded as a cultural reaction to the Union of Florence. Images of this kind should therefore be regarded as representations of the Orthodoxy, the Orthodox Church, especially the Novgorodian Church, and thus interpreted in the context of religious polemics with the followers of Latin Christianity.

In the three following parts of the book, the phenomenon under discussion is approached from three different perspectives: that of the art history (*Image*, p. 65–131); that of the identity of the orthodox people of Rus’ (*Identity*, p. 133–217); and that of the history itself (*History*, p. 219–285). Unfortunately, the Author is very selective in her choice of the source material on which the line of reasoning followed in the book is based. This holds true for all the three sections of the work mentioned above. Consequently, some monuments and testimonies that could be adduced in support of the work’s main thesis are omitted from the Author’s analysis, as are some that could be considered to be in disagreement with it.

The fourth chapter, *Representations of Wisdom in Rus’* (p. 67–76) offers a review of the images of the personified Divine Wisdom which were brought into being across the lands of the Eastern Slavs before the emergence of the Novgorodian iconography (given the topic under consideration, the review is surprisingly brief). The Author is right to note that the images in question fall into two types: those used to illustrate a fragment from the Old Testament Book of Proverbs devoted to the personified Sophia (Prov 9: 1–6) and those showing her in a company of the evangelists (p. 67). Ágnes Krisa states, at the same time, that *female Wisdom figures are also adopted from Late Byzantine art* (p. 74). This statement can be applied only to the first

of the motives mentioned above (illustration to Prov 9: 1–6), although the iconography of this type formed itself at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, probably in the area not of the Byzantine empire but of the Serbian Nemanjic monarchy². The tradition of creating the images of the personified Divine Wisdom in a company of Evangelists, Old Testament rulers and Church Fathers reaches back in Byzantine art to the sixth century, that is, to a much earlier period³. With the Author advancing the ecclesial interpretation of Sophia’s figure, it seems worthwhile to pay attention to the seals of the Church dignitaries of the Constantinople patriarchy from the sixth to the eighth centuries. The seals show a standing woman, signed as ΗΑΓΙΑ ΣΟΦΙΑ⁴.

The review of Sophia’s East Slavic images in which she is shown to serve as an inspiration for the Evangelists and Church Fathers is also incomplete. Among the artefacts created in Rus’ before the end of the sixteenth century, which are absent from the Author’s review, one should mention:

- Miniature from the manuscript ПГБ, 304. I.137, fol. Vv (1480s–1490s), containing a collection of texts by Gregory of Nazianzus, presented to the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius by Prince D.M. Požarskij. Sophia is shown there along with Gregory. There also appears a motif of the ‘source of Wisdom’,

² Z.A. BRZOZOWSKA, *Wisdom Has Built Her House (Prov 9:1–6). The History of the Notion in Southern and Eastern Slavic Art in the 14th–16th Centuries*, SCer 5, 2015, p. 34; EADEM, *Sophia: The Personification of Divine Wisdom in the Lower Danube Region*, [in:] *Routledge Handbook of Byzantium and the Danube Regions (13th–16th century)*, ed. M.A. ROSSI, A.I. SULLIVAN, Abingdon-on-Thames 2024 [to be published].

³ I have catalogued and analysed these images in the monograph: Z.A. BRZOZOWSKA, *Sofia – upersonifikowana Mądrość Boża...*, p. 174–193.

⁴ V. LAURENT, *Le Corpus des sceaux l’Empire byzantin*, vol. V.1, *L’Église de Constantinople*, Paris 1963, p. 43–44, 532–533, 740, 748, 766; vol. V.2, *L’Église. Planches*, Paris 1965, fig. 49, 703, 931, 951, 996; W. SEIBT, M.L. ZARNITZ, *Das Byzantinische Bleisiegel als Kunstwerk. Katalog zur Ausstellung*, Wien 1997, p. 122–123. Analysis of these seals: Z.A. BRZOZOWSKA, *Sofia – upersonifikowana Mądrość Boża...*, p. 194–197.

known from the wall paintings in the Serbian monastery of Lesnovo⁵.

- Miniature from the Novgorodian manuscript ПГБ, 209.794, fol. 1v (the end of the fifteenth century), a collection of sermons by pope Gregory the Great – the winged (sic!) Divine Wisdom appears there with the Roman pope, which is particularly interesting in the context of the Author's anti-Latin interpretation of sapiential iconography⁶.
- Three miniatures from the Gospel Book produced in the scriptorium of the Valaam Monastery, БАХ, 13.1.26 (the end of the fifteenth century) and showing Sophia with St. Mathew (fol. 72v), St. Mark (fol. 148v), and St. Luke (fol. 195v)⁷.
- Miniature from the Novgorodian manuscript from the beginning of the sixteenth century. In the nineteenth century it was framed as an icon – now in the holdings of the Andrej Rublev Museum in Moscow (КП 5318). It contains the image of Sophia with St. Mark⁸.
- Four miniatures from the Gospel Book ПГБ, 98.77 (mid-sixteenth century), showing the winged (sic!) Sophia with St. Mathew (fol. 9v), St. Mark (fol. 103v), St. Luke (fol. 164v) and St. John (fol. 262v).
- Three miniatures from the Gospel Book БАХ, 17.4.17 (from 1568) representing the Divine Wisdom with St. Mathew (fol. 23v), St. Mark (fol. 228v) and St. Luke (fol. 371v)⁹.

There is also a mistake that has crept into a description of one of the manuscripts mentioned by the Author: miniatures from the Gospel Book МГҮ, 2 Bg 42 show Sophia in the company of St. Mark (fol. 81v) and St. Luke (fol. 126v)¹⁰, not St. Mark and St. Mathew (p. 67).

In the fifth chapter, *The 'Novgorod Sophia' Icon as a 'Deesis'*, Ágnes Kriza interestingly argues that the direct source of inspiration for those who created the Novgorodian iconography were the compositions of the *Royal Deesis* type containing images of Christ dressed in imperial-priestly robes, and of the Mother of God wearing the attire of Byzantine empresses. In Novgorod the Great, these images began to be created around 1380, and in the Balkans, in the first half of the fourteenth century. According to the Author, the *Royal Deesis* scheme is a borrowing from the Western European representations of the *Coronation of the Virgin* and *Maria Regina* types, known from Italy, especially from Rome. Kriza claims that until the fourteenth century, in Byzantine art there were no images of the Mother of God dressed in imperial robes (p. 77–112). Leaving aside the fact that the *Maria Regina* iconography stems straight from the canons of the Byzantine painting¹¹, it was certainly advisable for the Author to pay attention to another monument (already analyzed in the subject literature) which is particularly significant in the context of studies on the origin of the representations of the personified Divine Wisdom: two mosaics surviving in the chapel of the amphitheatre in Dyrrachium (Durrës, Albania), from the sixth/seventh centuries. The mosaics contain two images of the Mother of God (the one of the *Maria Regina* type and the other almost entirely damaged) and the personified Sophia¹².

The sixth chapter, *Sophia in the Womb of the Virgin* (p. 113–136), provides an analysis of the images of the Mother of God with Christ-Emmanuel set in a medallion (the Author returns to the issue in chapter 8, *Leaven and Byzantine Marian Iconography*, p. 172–187, and in chapter 9, *Depicting Orthodoxy in Rus'*, p. 211–217). Ágnes Kriza is right to stress that representations from this group (*Nikopoios*, *Theotokos Orans*, *Blacherniotissa*, *Platytera*, *Znamenie*) carry

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 234–235 (with bibliographic references to the older literature of subject).

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 235–236.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 236–237, fig. 7, p. 471.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 237–238.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 238–239, fig. 8, p. 472.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 230–231.

¹¹ *Vide*: M. ANDALORO, G. BORDI, *La Maria Regina della 'parete palinsesto'*, [in:] *Santa Maria Antiqua tra Roma e Bisanzio*, ed. A. ANDALORO, G. BORDI, G. MORGANTI, Milano 2016, p. 154–159.

¹² Z.A. BRZOZOWSKA, *Sofia – upersonifikowana Mądrość Boża...*, p. 178–180, fig. 1, p. 467.

clear sapiential connotations: by carrying in her womb the Christ-Divine Wisdom, the Mother of God became 'Sophia's home', 'Sophia's temple', the Church. In this context, it comes as a surprise that the Author failed to include in her analysis the group of sources (the seals of the Novgorodian archbishops from the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries which often bore the image of the orant Mother of God with Emmanuel), which could be used as evidence supporting this view. On the seals of the archbishops, Dalmatius (1249–1274) and Clemens (1276–1299), the image is even accompanied by the inscription unambiguously identifying the Christ with Sophia¹³.



The seal of the Novgorodian archbishop Dalmatius (1249–1274). Drawing by E. MYŚLIŃSKA-BRZOZOWSKA according to: В.Л. Янин, *Актовые печати Древней Руси X–XV вв.*, vol. II, *Новгородские печати XIII–XV вв.*, Москва 1970, tabl. 10, fig. 454.

The tenth chapter, *Sophia, the Divine Wisdom, and the Union of Florence*, deals with references to Sophia found in Novgorodian chronicles. Krisa advances a thesis that the references pertain to the church understood both as a community of the faithful and as a specific building, the cathedral of St. Sophia in Novgorod the Great. This is where the question of some selectiveness sets in. Both redactions of the *Novgorod*

First Chronicle recording under AM 6746/AD 1237–1239 that Novgorod the Great was saved by *God and the great and sacred apostolic cathedral Church of St. Sophia*¹⁴, may of course suggest such an interpretation. However, it is worth noting that Sophia appears in this source in various contexts, often acting as an independent person. From the mid-fourteenth century on, the seat of the Novgorodian archbishops was referred to as 'St. Sophia's home', (a fact which is very important in relation to the Author's ecclesial understanding of the figure of the personified Divine Wisdom), and at the end of the twelfth century, the people of Novgorod began to believe that Sophia, apart from selecting a clergyman who was supposed to become their archbishop, took care of the city and its inhabitants, interceded with God on their behalf, resolved their disputes, and supported Novgorodian troops on the battlefield¹⁵. The question to be posed here is whether the Old Rus' understanding of the church (as a community and as a temple) allowed such beliefs to be held? It would be advisable to analyse the *Life of Euthymius* by Pachomius the Serb, to which the Author makes a reference (p. 242), and in which the personifications of Novgorodian churches, including the cathedral of St. Sophia, are to be found.

On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that Dobrynja Jadrejkovič (archbishop Anthony), whom we find mentioned in the book under review, states in the first words of the account of his trip (around 1200) to Constantinople that he reached the Byzantine capital *thanks to God's mercy and the help of St. Sophia – the Wisdom of the eternal Word*. There can be no doubt that he regarded Sophia – in line with the belief, widely accepted in Byzantine theology – as identical with Christ and that it was Christ to whom he referred in his work¹⁶.

¹⁴ *The Chronicle of Novgorod 1016–1471*, ed. C. RAYMOND BEAZLEY, A.A. SHAKMATOV, London 1914, p. 84.

¹⁵ Z.A. BRZOZOWSKA, *Sophia – the Personified Wisdom of God in the Culture of Novgorod the Great from 13th to 15th Century*, SCer 4, 2014, p. 13–26; EADEM, *Sofia – upersonifikowana Mądrość Boża...*, p. 321–334.

¹⁶ Z.A. BRZOZOWSKA, *The Church of Divine Wisdom or of Christ – the Incarnate Logos? Dedication of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople in the light of Byzantine Sources from 5th to 14th century*, SCer 2, 2012, p. 90.

¹³ В.Л. Янин, *Актовые печати Древней Руси X–XV вв.*, vol. II, *Новгородские печати XIII–XV вв.*, Москва 1970, p. 46–47, tabl. 10; Z.A. BRZOZOWSKA, *Sofia – upersonifikowana Mądrość Boża...*, p. 79, 168.

A similar phrase, although less developed, can be found in later Novgorodian *itineraria* (which are also omitted from the analysis). In Stephen of Novgorod's text from 1348/1349 one can, for example, read: *God, St. Sophia the Divine Wisdom, took pity on us*¹⁷. Formulas of this kind, pointing to acts of mercy/Sophia's intercessions with God, were also used in the preambles of agreements which the people of Novgorod the Great concluded during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries with, for example, the Hanseatic League or neighbouring rulers (another group of sources that is absent from the monograph)¹⁸.

However, the fact that the Author failed to include in her analysis a number of sources does not lessen the value of the work's main thesis, that is, the view that Sophia's iconography of the Novgorodian type, along with its commentary, was created around 1440 on the initiative of archbishop Euthymius II in reaction to the Union of Florence concluded between Constantinople and Rome in 1439, and that the figure of Sophia should be interpreted as a personification of the Orthodox Church in Novgorod the Great. However, it would be worth asking whether the creation of the iconography (like Euthymius's other initiatives) was motivated only by religious reasons (a polemic with Latin Christianity), or whether there were also more pragmatic factors involved. To put it differently, is it possible for this action to have been inspired not by the conclusion of the Union in Florence, but by the rejection of it in Moscow – a fact which entailed the unilateral proclamation of the autocephaly of the Rus' church. It is known that the people of Novgorod the Great watched with rising anxiety the growth of Moscow's expansionist tendencies. With the seat of the Kiev metropolitan having been moved to Moscow in 1325, Novgorod the Great sent several groups of envoys (one of those envoys was Stephen, the author of the *itinerarium* mentioned above) to the patriarch of Constantinople, probably with

the goal of changing the status of the Novgorodian archbishopric within the Kiev metropolitanate (autonomy? autocephaly?). A trace of the events of the time can be found in *The Tale of the Novgorodian White Cowl*, in which the pope is said to have passed this symbol of the highest ecclesiastical power to the patriarch of Constantinople who, however, feeling unworthy of it, had it sent to the archbishop of Novgorod the Great, Basil (1331–1352)¹⁹. It is worth noting that in terms of the Novgorodian archbishopric's ideological attitude toward Rome and Constantinople, which is discussed in the work's last chapter (p. 260–273), it would be helpful for the Author to include in her analysis the source mentioned above.

The creation of the new iconography of the Divine Wisdom, which was embedded both in the Christian orthodoxy and in the local tradition, may have been part of Euthymius's efforts to negotiate the highest possible position and the greatest possible scope of autonomy for his eparchy in the structure of the emerging, auto-cephalic church in Rus' (or, more hypothetically, outside this structure, but still within the Orthodox church). All the actions of this dignitary, of which we learn from Krisa's work (the renovation of the cathedral of the Divine Wisdom, the rebuilding of 'Sophia's home', that is, the seat of the Novgorodian archbishops, the canonization of local saints, the exhibition of their graves, the creation of hagiographical texts in their honour, the building and rebuilding of other churches in the city – p. 234–241), can be interpreted as aiming for the elevation of the status of the Novgorodian church. Moreover, Euthymius must have been aware of the fact that the threat posed by Moscow after 1448 continued to exist. Suffice it to mention that around 1450 he ordered the fortifications (walls and towers) surrounding the Novgorodian *kremlin* to be augmented²⁰. There is one more coincidence

¹⁷ *From the Wanderer of Stephen of Novgorod*, ed. G.P. MAJESKA, [in:] *IDEM, Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the 14th and 15th centuries*, Washington 1984, p. 28–29.

¹⁸ Z.A. BRZOZOWSKA, *Sophia – the Personified Wisdom...*, p. 22–23; ЕАДЕМ, *Sofia – upersonifikowana Mądrość Boża...*, p. 336.

¹⁹ The synopsis of the entire source with its fragmentary English translation: *The Tale of the White Cowl*, [in:] *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles and Tales*, ed. S.A. ZENKOVSKY, New York 1974, p. 323–332.

²⁰ Н.Н. КУЗЬМИНА, Л.А. ФИЛИППОВА, *Кремль*, [in:] *Великий Новгород. История и культура IX–XVII вв. Энциклопедический словарь*, ed. В.Л. Янин, Э.А. Гордиенко, Санкт-Петербург 2007, p. 256.

that is not without significance: around 1420, Novgorod the Great began to mint its own coins featuring the image of Sophia on the reverse (another group of sources absent from Krisa's analysis)²¹. Thus, Euthymius II, in propagating the new iconography of the Divine Wisdom, drew on one of the important symbols of the sovereignty of Novgorod the Great.

However, the initiative he took did not yield the intended effect: 30 years after his death Novgorod the Great lost its independence. However, Krisa rightly argues that on the ideological plane, *together with the 'Novgorod Sophia' icon, the Novgorodian clerics also exported the long-standing traditions of Novgorodian anti-Latin visual polemics to Muscovy where they took on a new relevance in the service of the new Orthodox 'tsardom'* (p. 285).

To sum up, the monograph under review is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to the research into the phenomenon of the personified Divine Wisdom in the culture of Eastern Slavs. As such, it inspires posing new questions and advancing new hypotheses. The inclusion in the book's appendix of the scholarly edition and the English translation of the source that is important for extending our knowledge of the motif under discussion is certain to advance our studies of the phenomenon of Sophia, especially those devoted to the Church Slavic literature (also the polemical one).

Translated by Artur Mękowski

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²¹ Z.A. Brzozowska, *Sophia – the Personified Wisdom...*, p. 23–24; Eadem, *Sofia – upersonifikowana Mądrość Boża...*, p. 337–339.

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